

## **Invest Today in Tomorrow's Health**

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01/08/07

“Sow a thought, reap an action;  
sow an action, reap a habit;  
sow a habit, reap a character;  
sow a character, reap a destiny.”

Financial gurus can calculate a person's net worth and their debt by looking at assets such as savings accounts, IRA's, tax deferred accounts and personal property. To increase our net worth and ensure a sound financial future, wealth experts recommend saving money as early as possible and as much as possible during earning years. We can't save sufficient money in a short period of time to compound the money. So the goal of our investment is to increase money over time in order to provide money during our retirement. Negative outcomes result when we fail to save enough money to enjoy those final years.

We could compare this same principle to health. We can “invest” in our health by making decisions daily that will affect us next year, or in five or ten years. For example, we can decide to eat adequate food portions and maintain a desired weight, or we can decide to eat too much and gain weight yearly. Additional weight can predispose us to diabetes, heart conditions, joint problems and depression. Imagine how great it would be if we maintained a more ideal body weight and were free from chronic health conditions that limit our daily activities! There is more good news. We would have more money to save or spend because we would not be using as much money for health care and prescriptions for chronic diseases. Most of us could really do better.

Research studies often tell us a lot about our health status. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported on our health-related quality of life in a 2003 study (see sidebar). Results of the study indicated Americans feel “healthy and full of energy” only about 19 days per month. They feel “unhealthy” (physically or mentally) about six days a month. The report also asked about how many days a month were “not good physical health” days. Those affected by cancer had the most days of “not good physical health” (16.4 days) followed by those with diabetes (13.1) days of “not good health.” Contrast that with adults who reported they had “no activity limitations” (1.7 days). The difference in the quality of life is glaring.

Health professionals tell us the road to good health can be found by eating a variety of foods, exercising five or more days a week, limiting your use of alcohol and avoiding drugs. Routine health screenings are also an important part of good health, as are giving up smoking and buckling your seat belt each time you are in a vehicle.

What health habits are you developing? Steven R. Covey, author of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, defines habits as “the intersection of knowledge, skill and desire.” Knowledge is the situation or the ‘what to do and the why’; skill is the ‘how to do’; and desire is the motivation or the ‘want to do’. In order to make

something a habit in our lives, we really need to have all three. Developing good habits and reinforcing them can be done the very same way we developed bad habits in the past—by repetition. We can replace the bad habits with good ones and as a result have more days of good health each month.

Good health choices can be seen as making a “deposit” into your short-term and long-term “health account.” Making unhealthy decisions can be seen as “withdrawals.” Think about it and answer this question for yourself: “What decisions am I currently making to invest in my “health account?” Clearly, the decisions we make today will impact our “health account” tomorrow. Start by adding one or more activities to develop a good health habit and to make a deposit in your future “health account.”

Remember, health is a blessing that money can’t buy. Take care of yours!

For more information call the Springfield-Greene County Health Department at (417) 864-1658 or go online to <http://health.springfieldmogov.org>.